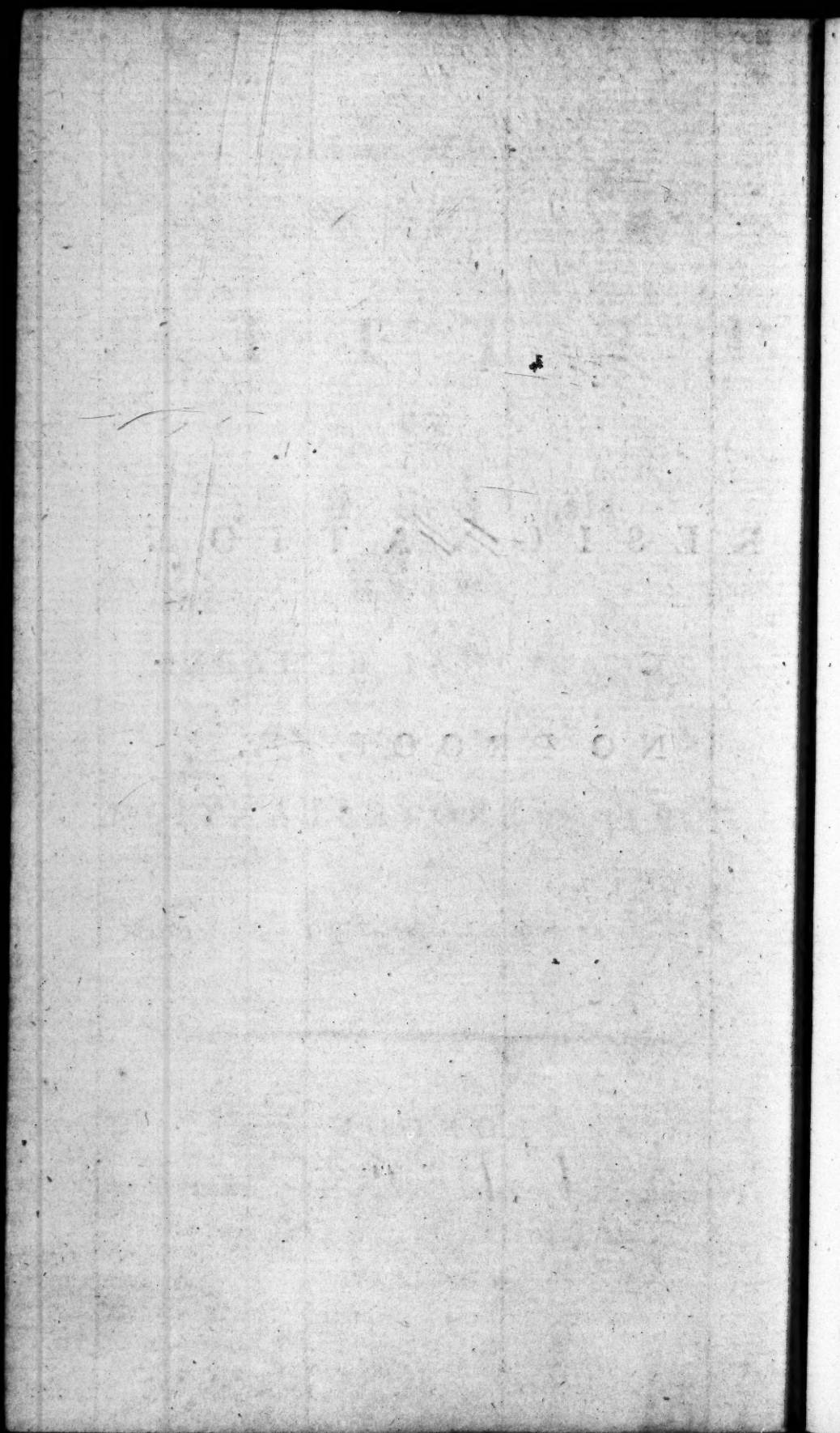


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L E T T E R

TO

MR. J E B B; *K*

WITH

OCCASIONAL REMARKS

ON HIS

SPIRIT OF PROTESTANTISM.

By a MEMBER of the Univerfity of CAMBRIDGE.

L O N D O N :

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M.DCC.LXXVI.

L E T T E R

MR. J. E. B. B.

WITH

ON HIS



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LETTER, &c.

IT has been often asked, and it is a question of great importance, "what makes a man a Christian, and what profession of Faith is sufficient for that purpose?" And it has been generally acknowledged, that what alone can entitle any one to this appellation, is, a belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah; hereby assenting to whatever is recorded of him in the Scriptures, respecting his Person and Office, his human nature and

divine. If therefore the authority of the Scriptures be acknowledged, it is only necessary to shew that this doctrine is contained in them; and this will appear evidently to those who consider at large the whole tenor of the Gospel History. For partial reasonings on detached portions of it are not to be regarded in argument; nothing in the Scriptures is to be explained, but as it stands in context with the whole. The union of the divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the object of the New Testament. This being admitted, every position falls into sense, and the farther you advance, the weight of argument is increased. In any other sense it cannot possibly be explained; it is full of insuperable difficulties and irreconcilable contradictions.

It should seem therefore unreasonable, that any one who rejects this most essential article of the Christian Faith should still claim the right of being considered as a Christian. This privilege, however,
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you still assert in its utmost extent, though in the state of your opinions given to the public, you seem to want the primary and most necessary qualification. The doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ is of the utmost consequence: and, if there were the least room to suppose it could reasonably be denied, might justly give the alarm to every serious Christian: for it will not admit of the least accommodation; it must either be firmly established, or Christianity must fall with it.

But when I reflect, that this important question has been already impartially discussed, its merits formally decided, I am perfectly at ease on the score of Religion. If this had not been the case, you might reasonably have expected to have had your cause fairly and candidly examined. The errors of mankind, especially in religious matters, are ever to be attended to; and there are scarce any argument so weak, which should not be heard with patience, and refuted with candour: if not from their own importance, yet

from that principle of Christian charity, which enjoins us to bear with the prejudices of the weaker brethren.

That you should again solicit the attention of the public, for a cause already determined, and without any thing new to offer in its support, is, however, trespassing too much on their patience. There is a deference due to mankind in their critical as well as judicial character; without which, frivolous suits would be multiplied, and controversy endless. The hardiest Advocate, however zealous for the interest of his Client, presumes not to expect a re-hearing of his cause, but upon different ground and points hitherto unargued: and however dissatisfied he may be with the unfavourable award, has the modesty at least to acquiesce in the determination.

I have ever thought that some allowance may be made for the *authors* of particular opinions, however singular and heretical. Before they have seen them thoroughly discussed, it is probable that,
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either from vanity or want of information, they may be induced to suppose themselves not entirely mistaken. But religious controversy, though it has been in some respects injurious to Christianity, has, in this, been highly beneficial: it has shewed us the strength of the cause we have to defend. And from the variety of opinions that have been canvassed in the debate, it now seems hardly probable that any new Errors can arise, any Heretical Tenets, however disguised or diversified in their appearance, which have not already been as ably as successfully refuted. But what indulgence is due to those, who, in adopting the fanciful delusions of others, not only stand alike in opposition to Reason and Truth, but have not even the single plea, poor and inconsiderable as it is, the merit of invention? It is, however, judged not unworthy the Schismatics of these days to take up the wild suggestions of others, and propagate errors at second-hand. The same restless spirit continues; and

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men chuse rather to distinguish themselves on the side of error, than think with the vulgar, or, as they affect to call it, not to think for themselves. To this vanity I profess myself a stranger: and sooner would I wish to pass unnoticed in the common herd of believers, and live upon the most implicit credulity transmitted by our Ancestors, than servilely adopt the follies of others, and retail the crude and incoherent systems of Dogmatists, long since consigned to oblivion and contempt.

It is, indeed, unfortunate that, armed as you are at every point, and furnished with arguments of various kind, all impregnable and religion-proof, nothing should be wanting to signalize you on this glorious occasion,—but an Adversary. The truth is, the subject is already exhausted. There is nothing left, either for you to advance, or for your adversary to refute. Socinianism has been long given up, though defended by men of confessed abilities, and by all the arts of ingenious

ingenious sophistry and refined criticism. Its very beginning was inauspicious. The different sects of Christians laid aside for a time their mutual animosity, in order jointly to suppress it. Papists, Lutherans, and Calvinists, united to oppose a doctrine so fraught with impiety, and so evidently subversive of the great article of the Christian faith. From this persecution, at length it gained some respite in a Country, where never yet sedition or heresy were refused admittance: where, with every civil privilege in view, they know not the happiness of Liberty, nor, with the toleration of every religious opinion, the blessings of Religion. But with the dissolution of the Racovian Academy, it might have been hoped, that we had bidden adieu to these doctrines for ever. For though some few attempts have been since made in their favour, no European nation has yet been persuaded to grant a public settlement to a Sect, whose members denied the Divinity of Christ.

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Unless, therefore, you suppose, that what is heresy in one age, may be deemed sound doctrine in another, to what purpose is it now revived? If you have not accustomed yourself to read only on one side of the question, you must have seen your opinions clearly refuted by some of the ablest advocates of the Christian cause; unless, indeed, more goes to the persuasion of some men than reason and demonstration. And had you not introduced them with an Argument, which, if not altogether new, is rather unusual in these days, I should have thought them best answered by neglect. There has been a time, when you would not have been suffered to have propagated such tenets, with impunity; and when you might have been glad to have escaped with the judgment passed on *Postellius* by the Venetian Inquisition, — "*Postellum non esse hæreticum, tantum amentem.*" I say not this as an advocate for the restraint of private judgment, and much less as the friend of Persecution.

Persecution: But this I say, that if freedom of disquisition has been attended in some instances with the greatest advantages, it has often exhibited in others the most striking inconveniences. The present age has adopted this privilege in its utmost extent and without reserve. We have tempted both Religion and Liberty in their extremes; and we now begin to feel the glorious effects of it. And as the resistance of legal authority is by many not considered as repugnant to the spirit of the Constitution, I much question if this flagrant attack on one of the most essential articles of our Faith will be deemed injurious to Christianity.

The only Argument you have offered that deserves attention, and which you was well aware would be of more service to your cause than all the finesse of Sophistry, is, the resignation of your Prefement. How far this *ought* to operate, will be considered hereafter. At present I shall only observe, that in former times, when many were ready to lay down not only

only their fortunes, but their lives also, in defence of principles however erroneous, this circumstance would have had no effect. But, such instances of constancy and self-denial being now uncommon, we build with much greater advantage than our Predecessors even on the same foundation. In these self-interested times, an act of this nature will be considered by many, as one of those wonders which they will scarce believe though a man declare it unto them.— With others, who take up their opinions on trust and the authority of their Teacher, it will pass for demonstration of truth. And with most, if it be not an argument of the goodness of your cause, will, at least, afford a presumptive proof of your sincerity. And though some few might be inclined to think that you foresaw in what manner you could easily indemnify yourself; yet for the present at least are we all bound to believe, that you have acted from motives altogether disinterested, and the most zealous regard for Truth.

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There is a certain degree of generosity in a man's professing himself an open enemy. To this praise you are justly entitled. But when I have allowed you the merit of not having sacrificed to hypocrisy and dissimulation, I can grant no more. I feel an honest indignation at the boldness of the attempt to subvert the very first principles of our Religion : I lament the lukewarmness and indifference of Christians in matters of such moment ; and begin to apprehend that we shall suffer such frequent inroads to be made on our Religious as well as Civil rights, as hereafter to find much difficulty in maintaining that ground, which at first would have cost us little trouble to defend.

Yet think not I have even a wish that you had acted otherwise. God forbid, that any one professing such principles should have continued in the character of a Teacher in the Church of Christ. On the contrary I shall think you entitled to our sincerest thanks, if your conduct should so far operate on your Brethren of
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the same persuasion, as to induce them to follow your example. We should then be enabled to distinguish the true friends of the Church from those insidious members, who are secretly undermining our Establishment, while they profess to bear up the pillars of it. That the evil has spread wider than is generally imagined, there is too much reason to fear. But, be the consequences what they may, no less desirable would be the event; nay though it made our Establishment tremble to its center, and even shook the Episcopal Chair itself, under whose sanction you first broached, and have since propagated, opinions of such dangerous tendency, as might
 But though I doubt not many reasons may have concurred in occasioning your resignation, I own myself perfectly satisfied with those you have given to the public. To the more immediate reasons for this measure, you have thought proper to add your remarks concerning the Spirit of Protestantism with some reflections on the study of the Scriptures. In this you
 have

have acted fairly enough ; for if any doubt could have remained, with respect to the occasion of it, it can certainly no longer subsist. By thus stating your opinions, and your plan of Theological studies, you have clearly shewn the progress of those Principles which reduced you to this embarrassment; and how impossible it was for you to have acted otherwise with the least regard to consistency and truth. It plainly appears, by positions here laid down, unfairly deduced and unhappily misapplied, how gradually you have been led on to the avowal of such Opinions, of which perhaps some time ago you would not have thought yourself capable. And by a due observance of the same method, by pursuing the same plan of investigating scriptural Truth, any one may, in like manner, be as certainly led from Free Enquiry to Scepticism and from Scepticism to Infidelity.

Immaterial as the actions or opinions of Individuals may be, when confined to

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themselves;

themselves; it is far otherwise if their influence can be supposed to extend to others. The same train of argument will naturally lead to the same conclusions. Every one, therefore, should consider, whether the path will lead him, before he incautiously pursues it. And, therefore, it is the purpose of the following remarks, briefly to point out the fallacy of those Principles which you have laid down in support of your System; that no one, either misled by a deference to confessed abilities, or even to the exercise of private virtues, may inconsiderately adopt them. Nothing here offered is even supposed to be conclusive. They are obvious reflections, which occurred on first reading the state of your Opinions: but, if they appear so highly exceptionable at first sight, it is most probable that, upon a closer examination, they may be totally overthrown. My design will be sufficiently answered, if it should suggest to any of your future Hearers, the propriety of considering more minutely

minutely the several component parts of your System; and before they give you credit for the superstructure, examine the foundation on which it is built; keeping ever in mind this indubitable maxim, "that if the first principles are false, the conclusion to which they lead, cannot possibly be true."

I shall, therefore, pursue the method laid down in that course of study, intended for the instruction of your Protestant, and shall accompany him from his infant state of Enquiry to his maturity in Irreligion and Error.

The first privilege which he is taught to claim, and which he is to consider as a fundamental principle of Protestantism, is "the right not only of judging for himself, but also of avowing that judgment in whatever manner he thinks proper."—A truly conscientious man will be satisfied with enjoying his opinions in private; it is the furious Zealot and Dogmatist alone, who wish to impose them on others. For it is absurd to

suppose, when a Man gives his Opinions to the world, that he is indifferent about the event; that he neither wishes nor flatters himself that he shall gain a favourable reception for them. With what view they are thus openly avowed, is evident; and however disinterestedly, and without design, he may pretend to submit them to the attention of mankind, he would be cruelly mortified if he did not meet with their applause. But if we could even suppose, that the Author himself was indifferent about gaining profelytes to his Principles, they may have that influence whether he intends it or not. The *first* part of the claim, therefore, we grant in its fullest extent; but it will be necessary to know, what these Opinions are, what may be their effect both on Society and Individuals, before we confirm the *latter*.

Nor is this right of *avowing* his Principles at all the more admissible, because "it is in the option of every one to reject them."—This would, at once, open a door

door for every kind of blasphemy and licentiousness, if mankind had the right of *propagating* Errors and Folly, as they have the faculty of inventing them. I doubt not but your Protestant clearly sees the use that may be made of this privilege, as he claims more than is usually demanded by the most strenuous assertors of Christian liberty. The author of the Confessional himself claims only the right of publishing his opinions "within decent restrictions." —

I am aware that to the liberty of open controversy we owe the glorious effects of the Reformation. But whoever should consider that æra as a pattern for succeeding times, would shew himself no judge of these matters. The spirit of Luther was well adapted to the peculiar circumstances of that Age: In these days, such violence would be execrated. Mankind had not then been permitted to think for themselves, even on those points which most nearly concerned them; and therefore heard with particular partiality, any

one who endeavoured to put them in possession of that desirable privilege. But now they not only claim *that* right, but *another* also no less valuable, "that of enjoying it free and unmolested."

Your Protestant, having established, as he imagines, a right of *avowing* his Principles in any manner he thinks proper, proceeds to exercise it in its utmost latitude; and accordingly he asserts, "that each man is at liberty to worship God according to that specific ceremonial which in his own conscience he shall approve."—Hence it will follow, that man may not only be a Law, but likewise a Religion to himself.—Hence may arise as many Religions as Individuals; Gods many and Lords many. If this was ever to be admitted, we might, indeed, have much shew of religious worship; but I fear little Religion. And that we might justly apply to ourselves, what was said by one on being asked his opinion of the state of Philosophy at Athens; "Philosophantes"

“sophantes ibi vidi plurimos, Philosophum nullum.”

If it be argued, “That it is a right inherent in our common nature,” I answer, There are many rights that we have voluntarily resigned, many that we are better without; and from the exercise of which, it is well we are happily restrained. Besides, as we have now subjected ourselves to the controul of Laws, to no purpose do we talk of rights that were prior to their existence. We have certainly resigned, in some measure, to Society, our religious as well as civil rights; and this claim of worship, however subsisting in full force before the existence of civil government, must now be regulated by it. “To extend the principle of Christian Toleration beyond the profession of Christianity itself,” has certainly the appearance of a great and noble Idea. But it seems to me, that in the sense your Protestant means to apply this, it is just as reasonable to talk of extending a thing beyond

itself. If it were only meant, that Christianity should extend its toleration to any one *without* the pale of its Church, in the highest degree imaginable, I answer, This it professedly does to Jews, Turks, and Infidels of every denomination. But if it be farther contended, that any one, worshipping God according to his own specific Ceremonial, (if that be essentially repugnant to the principles of the Christian Institution), has yet a right to be considered as a Christian, nothing ever was less true. Christianity, like every other Institution, has its laws, its privileges, its limits. It cannot, therefore, contradict and be at variance with itself.—It cannot permit any of its *own* Members to worship God in any other manner than that which its own Laws prescribe. This Christianity itself cannot tolerate. Your Protestant, then, has only this alternative; if his religious worship is in no respect *essentially* different from the Christian model, he will be justly entitled to that appellation; but if he claims a right of

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worship, differing from the Christian in any material or fundamental points, the principle of Toleration may be extended to him as to other *Unbelievers*, but he is certainly no longer a Christian.

But while every kind of restraint is thus disclaimed, it is no wonder that the Test-Act should meet with particular disapprobation. And in this you are countenanced by what I suppose you consider as the highest authority. (The Author of the Confessional has said, "that there is not an instance of a law, in a Protestant Community, which is less defensible in a religious view, than the Sacramental Test, as a qualification for holding civil offices." And Bishop Hoadly's determination is produced on this occasion as unanswerable: "That wherever conscience is concerned, whether in matters of doctrine or discipline, there all Law-givers or Judges, Christ alone excepted, are excluded." I should not presume to question such high authority, if I had not the sanction of one who is universally
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allowed to have considered this Subject with the greatest accuracy, abilities, and judgment. And I am not inclined to think, that what he long since laid down on this point, has hitherto been refuted. Hooker had no doubt himself, and has evinced it on the clearest proofs to others, that the Legal Powers *have* an unquestionable right to make laws for the Church, provided they were adapted to its particular circumstances, and not repugnant to the fundamental laws of the great Legislator. And therefore he condemns, expressly, “the loose and licentious opinions of *those*” (meaning the Anabaptists of those times) “who held that the Church of Christ should admit no Lawgivers but the Evangelists*.”

But, without the sanction of this respectable name, it must be obvious to every one, that according to his Lordship's position, cases of conscience could never be determined at all. For, from whence

* Eccles. Pol. B. iii. Sect. 9.

do we collect that Christ will visibly interpose to determine the doubts and scruples that arise in the minds of his followers? Not from the Scriptures, I am sure, nor from any instances in former Ages. The truth should rather seem to be, that, having established the essential Doctrines of his Church, on the most solid foundation, he referred the administration of Discipline to the Members of it: hereby leaving them at liberty to adapt and accommodate matters of lesser moment, as the different complexion of the times and circumstances should require; still having respect to that measure of Christian Charity, which was to influence and regulate the whole. It may, therefore, fairly be presumed, that our Religious liberties were left to be determined in the same manner with our Civil rights, by the majority of those who have acceded to the same bond of Union. For I apprehend there is no other, or at least no better, method of Human determination,

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" But we shall be told, that our Chris-
 " tian liberty, and right of private judg-
 " ment, cannot be made over to another
 " as our civil rights: that the great affair
 " of our Salvation must be determined,
 " not by human guides, but by the re-
 " vealed word of God." True: And for
 this very reason, the legislative power in
religious societies is always more parti-
 cularly conferred with this restriction,
 " that it shall be exercised agreeably
 " thereto." When this principle is at-
 tended to, the natural rights of Chris-
 tianity are secured; when it is otherwise,
 non-compliance, as in other cases of
 usurped authority, would be justifiable.

Perhaps it would save much unnec-
 cessary reasoning on this subject, if it
 were remembered, that the application of
 religious Tests to civil purposes, is not
 on a religious but *civil* account. It is
 the provision of the State for its own
 security, and results solely from the as-
 sociation of Religion with the Civil power.
 Religion and Government have un-
 doubtedly

doubtedly their separate and distinct privileges. But as Religion has confessedly a most powerful influence on Society, it seems to be the perfection of human policy to incorporate them in such a manner as to make them operate to the good of the whole. In the establishment of a Test it is evidently implied, that the safety of one is connected with that of the other; To say therefore that the Civil power has no right to demand it, is to affirm that Religion is independent and out of the reach of Civil sanctions; not considering that however distinct their natures may be, new laws must necessarily arise from their connection. And if the same Legislative power is intrusted with both, if our religious as well as civil rights are in any value or estimation with them, if they are convinced they must stand or fall together, is it not reasonable to suppose that they will give a preference to those who are most likely to contribute to their support? Is it just to expect that they should observe a perfect indifference, an
exact

exact neutrality? and that they should pay no regard to the Principles of those whom they are about to advance to Authority and Honor. This would be not only to abandon their trust, but to betray it; and to furnish either avowed Enemies or treacherous Friends with the very means of destroying the constitution both in Church and State.

But if a Test is absolutely necessary, "is not a subscription to the Bible sufficient? Why is the original Charter of *Christians* violated by requiring any other?"

If indeed the sacred Text could not possibly be misunderstood, or if Interpreters had nothing in view but a sincere regard for truth, to the Bible at large would I refer them. But when we see the plainest text designedly perverted, and particular passages, without any respect to the tenor of the Context, pressed into the support of particular Systems, it is become necessary to direct not only that the Bible shall be our guide, but in what sense it is to be understood: to affix a precise and specific sense

sense to such parts of Scripture as may
 be abused to the very destruction of the
 Christian Church. A Subscription, in
 general terms, would undoubtedly give
 great satisfaction to many: but I fear it
 would make but few Friends. Who sees
 not that Sects of every denomination would
 shew the sanction of Scripture for their
 usurped authority? Cannot Papists prove
 from thence Transubstantiation, and their
 seven Sacraments, as clearly as the Ana-
 baptists the insensibility of the soul after
 death, or the Turlupins their liberty of
 spirit? What an heterogeneous mixture
 of Semi-Arians and Pelagians, Socinians,
 and Hegrenhutters, Sublapsarians, and Su-
 pralapsarians, Verschorists and Hattemists,
 by this comprehensive scheme would flow
 in unto us! And if Antichrist himself
 should desire admittance, I see not how he
 can civilly be refused. Perhaps, by thus
 throwing open our gates, some few pro-
 felyses might be gained. But as there is
 less evil in excluding one honest man,
 than in admitting a hundred of suspicious
 character,

character, I should be rather for strengthening than removing the barriers of defence. For how perniciously may this unreserved liberty operate in the hands of *designing* men, when it has so evidently misled *one*, who solemnly professes to venerate the amiable form of Truth?

Thus disengaged from all incumbrances civil and religious, your Protestant hopes he shall be allowed to attach himself to any Sect he shall think proper. And though he is sensible *That every considerable error respecting the object of religion is attended with pernicious consequences*, he immediately acts but inconsistently with his own opinion. It will be acknowledged I believe, that the Athanasian, the Arian, the Socinian, differ much in the Essentials of Religion. And yet he maintains, That the persons who embrace any of them, or *any other system*, (which by the bye, is taking things in their utmost latitude) if they testify only an obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, and live in the practice of Christian duties, are all equally

equally Christians, and as such entitled to their reward.

This has ever been the language of those who would reduce the whole of Religion to practical piety and Virtue, and willingly promote the one at the expence of the other. The love of God and the love of Man undoubtedly form the substance of true religion. But these virtues were not only understood but practised by the unenlightened Heathens. To what purpose then was a dispensation given to mankind, but to teach us the way of God more perfectly? And are there no additional duties required, no new object of Gratitude proposed, nothing delivered in this last and most perfect revelation of God's will to man, but what Heathen Moralists before had taught? It should seem, indeed, to be nothing but an improved system of Morality, when we hear it asserted, that its most essential Articles of Faith are *unjustifiably* contended for among Christians, and that the inherent dignity of its Author is *falsely* supposed

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to be necessary to Salvation. But the fullest evidence in this case will avail little. What men are determined not to see, can never be made clear. But let it be remembered, that he who errs through ignorance, stands in a very different situation from him who wilfully shuts his eyes against the truth. To err is the infirmity of our nature, but the act of the will is our own.

We have not yet clearly seen to what particular Sect the concession of these privileges would more immediately lead us. But the scene now opens upon us. And when I perceive the mysterious doctrines of Christianity ridiculed under the expression of an *intelligible* Religion, it is easy to discern the favourite doctrine of the Racovian Academy. It was the plausible tenet of Socinus, "that our knowledge of divine things was solely derived from the Holy Scriptures."

But in giving to Reason the full right of deciding on the nature, and expounding the various doctrines of Religion, he did,

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in fact, establish the superiority of Reason to the Scriptures. It was not then so much the Scriptures which instruct us in the nature and perfections of the Deity, as Human Reason, which was to shew us the system of religion that we ought to seek in, and deduce from them.

This pre-eminence being allotted to Reason, or as the Socinians affect to call it, Right Reason, they established this fundamental rule, "that no doctrine ought to be acknowledged as true or divine, that was not level to the comprehension of the human understanding."

Hence your commendations of an intelligible Religion and a well-informed Mind: hence the source of those pernicious tenets which must necessarily lead to universal Scepticism and Infidelity.

But if all things that surpass the limits of our understanding are to be rejected, what will become of Religion in general? for I speak not now of the Christian. -- Perhaps the first and greatest Truth, and what we are most concerned to acknow-

ledge, will not stand this Test. I mean the Being of a God. And I rather chose to instance in this particularly, because it is a point on which you express yourself fully satisfied; and therefore, according to your own principles, you must clearly comprehend it. I am firmly persuaded myself of the Existence of a God: perhaps you will tell me, that by Right Reason, you can demonstrate it. It may, I think, by arguments *a priori*, be fairly deduced, though perhaps by the other method more justly inferred. Mr. Lindsey, indeed, sets out with this assertion, "That the unlearned Reader sees at once, that the God who made him and whom he is to adore, is one without multiplicity or division, even as he knoweth himself to be one, being one person, not many." But what if it should be said, that so far from the *unlearned* seeing at first sight this truth, the most learned man living never had a clear Idea of it? For I will here venture to assert, that the belief of a first Cause, and how any thing should be

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of itself without any cause of its being, is absolutely inconceivable to a finite understanding. It is, indeed, a suggestion of natural Religion, and we are, as it were, compelled to acknowledge a Deity; but perhaps not so much from reason as necessity: as that the mind, being entirely lost in the contemplation of this doctrine, and able to find no rest, gladly takes refuge in acknowledging one eternal and wise mind, "the principle and first cause of all things;" as contributing to throw light on other interesting truths, itself still remaining inexplicable.

I should not have urged this, but to a Socinian, to a professed Advocate for the all-sufficiency of human Reason. And it is only mentioned to shew how absurd it is to declare those doctrines contrary to reason, which are not amenable to it; and that it is very possible there may be truths, which we are obliged to believe though we cannot comprehend.

The dignity of Reason is an idea so flattering to the mind of man, that we

cannot withhold our assent. We make the most ample concessions before we are aware of the consequence. But yet it is necessary, that we should be *gradually* led on to this belief, before we can be prevailed on to consider its authority altogether decisive and without appeal. For, were even your Protestant to be told, on his first setting out in his religious enquiries, that his Reason was of superior authority to the revealed word of God, he would revolt against the position, and disclaim the Teacher. But when artfully conducted, step by step, to the belief of his own consequence, and, from the insidious pretence of not falling into error, cautioned against giving credit to any thing which his Reason does not comprehend, he is betrayed into the acknowledgement of possessing those powers, which, being incompatible with our present condition, Nature never could bestow. The knowledge, not only of things human but divine, is now submitted to this infallible criterion, this test of Truth.

The consequence is natural and certain. That very Reason, which under due restriction, and within its proper sphere, would have preserved him from error, when urged and trusted too far, infallibly leads to it. No sooner does Reason hesitate to determine for him, than he becomes a Sceptic; when in his farther researches he is confounded, he commences Infidel.

It is to this pre-eminence, vainly attributed to the human understanding, that we at first owed the errors of the Socinian Heresy, whose professed principle it was to exalt reason against Revelation. To the same vanity we may again refer the revival of it. Hence it is, that we are required, even by such as profess to call themselves Christians, to prove the very first and most essential Articles of Faith; that we are expected to shew, not only that its sublimer doctrines are agreeable to the revealed word of God, but also to the right Reason of Man. But, however, this may be more than they

than they have any right to expect; wherefore should we decline the enquiry? For if nothing be more true than our Religion, why should we fear the most strict and minutest examination?

There is an advantage, not unknown to the adversaries of Religion, in striking at once at the very fundamentals of it. If it should have but little effect with the more discerning, it may serve to astonish and confound the ignorant. At the same time be it remembered, that the stronger the objection, which is unsuccessfully urged, the more powerfully will it operate to the prejudice of the cause it was intended to support. I am therefore the less solicitous about the importance of your extraordinary assertion, "That the doctrine of the Trinity is equally contrary to sound reason and the Scriptures." Now, though here is equally implied a denial of the Divinity of the Son and Holy Ghost; and though the beliefs of each is a necessary article of Faith, yet the consideration of the former will,

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perhaps, not be thought unworthy our more particular attention. For if it be true, that the distance between Jesus Christ and Deity is infinite; if he be no more than a Prophet of higher rank; if our prayers may with no more propriety be directed to him than to the Virgin Mary; then are Christians guilty of the grossest Idolatry: and this strange conclusion will follow; "That the very Religion, which was evidently intended for the destruction of Idolatry, does in a more particular manner authorize and support it than any other religious Institution in the World."

But I can never believe so improbable a contradiction. I cannot but think, that the same Almighty power and goodness, which so visibly interposed in the establishment of a Religion evidently intended for the benefit and happiness of Mankind; would also in his mercy have prevented so general; so fatal a delusion. I am induced therefore to think the alarm which you have sounded on this occasion

unnecessary, and your arguments in support of your Opinions ill-grounded. When the essential doctrines of Christianity are thus publicly denied, it should seem to be the duty of every true Christian as openly to appear in their support. Not that I wish to enter the lists of religious Controversy; it is seldom convincing, generally uncharitable: but only briefly to offer such remarks on the state of your Opinions, which if they tend not to the conviction of others, will at least express my own private disapprobation. Arguments in support of our Religion are not at this time of day to be invented. Nor is it even to be wished; for what better means of defence could be desired, than what has already been found sufficient for its support? No apology, therefore, will be necessary for applying to our own use, what has been serviceable to others on the like occasion.

As I am firmly persuaded, that the doctrine of the Trinity is contained in the Scriptures, I am the less anxious about

reducing it to the level of human comprehension. That it is a Mystery above our reason, is true; but I own I could wish to prove, that it is not *contrary* to it. And I think it may be shewn, both from Reason and the Scriptures, that the Unity of the Godhead is still preserved, though we are taught to acknowledge a Plurality of Persons.

The Almighty Author of the Universe is undoubtedly, in the strictest sense of the expression, ONE. We acknowledge the glory and pre-eminence of the first Cause which is clearly due to him: he is God not of any other, but himself; nor can any other be God, but of him. But at the same time we think it no diminution to the Son, to say that he receives his essence by communication from another; though it were a diminution of the Father to speak so of him. The Father is not God by reason of the Son; whereas the Son is God by communication from the Father.

Neither

Neither does this establish a Plurality of Gods. For we say, there is but one Person, who is from none. If there were more than one, it could not be denied, but that there were more Gods than one. But the Son and Holy Ghost have, for that reason, been believed to be but one God with the Father; because both are from the Father who is but One, and so he is the union of them.

In the Scriptures, THREE are certainly spoken of distinctly and separately from each other; in whose names we are baptized, and to each of whom the highest titles and properties of God are attributed. Now the same Scriptures, as not questioning the Unity of the divine Nature, still assert that there is but one God. The Scriptures, therefore, do not intend to teach a plurality of Gods in *that* sense; from whence, however, you derive your principal, if not your only, objection.

It were to be wished, that a greater precision was observed in the Terms made use of in explaining this doctrine.

do not immediately consider, that Unity, applied to substance, and Unity of numbers, convey different ideas. Thus if I say, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, being Three numerically, are One also, in the same sense, I should not blame any one for saying that I speak unintelligibly. But I apprehend, that I do not shock the common sense of any one when I assert, that the divine essence of the Father, though communicated to the Son and Holy Ghost, still continues in them all One and the same. Some have thought this might be aptly illustrated by several rays proceeding from the same fountain of light: and perhaps from this idea arose that expression in the Nicene Creed, "God of God, and Light of Light." If, however, the Unity of the Godhead of the Father and the Son be admitted, we have already sufficient authority for addressing our prayers to him: he is become a proper object of our adoration, being not inferior to the Father, with whom he is One God.

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But after all, the nice and subtle distinctions of men are not to regulate our religious opinions. From the Scriptures alone are we to look for information; upon their testimony to make out the credibility of the doctrine in question, and upon their authority to believe it.

I might, on this occasion, in my turn, overwhelm you at once with marginal references, and produce numberless texts of Scripture, all equally strong and conclusive. But as a Reader, when directed to such a multiplicity of proofs, is generally deterred from referring to any, I shall content myself with selecting one single passage, on which I am willing to rest the whole of this controversy, as far as it relates to the Divinity of Christ.

The place alluded to is the beginning of St. John's Gospel, from whence I make the following inferences:

That Christ (there called the Word) was eternal; because, *In the beginning the Word was*; that is, when things began to be

be made, he *was*, and did not then begin to be; and consequently eternal.

2. That he was *with God*; that is, together with him, partaker of his happiness and glory; as our Saviour himself says, "Glorify me, O Father, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

3. That he was *God*. Not God the fountain and principle of Deity; for, to prevent this mistake, it is immediately added, *The same was in the beginning with God*: but God by participation or communication.

And lastly, That he existed before his incarnation. For *the Word was made flesh*: that same Word, before described with all those attributes of power and glory, assumed human nature, and became in the likeness of man.

This plain and natural interpretation of the passage has ever stood in the way of those who denied the Divinity of Christ. Socinus was aware of the difficulty, and accordingly endeavoured to put a different

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construction on it. How forced, how unscriptural, his interpretation was, I shall not now enquire; but only observe, that whoever can acquiesce in it, by supposing that St. John is here speaking not of the old, but of the new creation of the World by Jesus Christ, and the reformation of Mankind by the preaching of the Gospel, must be as strangely delighted with novelty as possessed by prejudice. It should seem likewise extraordinary, that this passage was never understood before; for Socinus gloried in the novelty of this exposition, and applauded himself for it. From whence it is evident to a demonstration, that the preceding Ages of the Church admitted this passage in the sense we now receive it.

And this reminds me of adverting to your assertion, wherein it is said, "that the doctrine of the Trinity does not appear to have been the sentiment of the earliest Ages of the Church." This, I suppose, is thrown out as one of those things to which a man may give credit

or

or not, at his pleasure. For you can never be serious in maintaining this against the express and concurrent testimony of the Fathers of the Church.— There are some, I am persuaded, who have taken upon them to controvert this Authority, without any other knowledge of the nature of the evidence, than as they have seen it collected by others. Ignorance of this sort I object not to any one as a crime. A man may certainly be a very good Christian, without this knowledge, though an inaccurate Controversial Writer. But yet, when any one thinks proper peremptorily to declare the sentiments of those times, perhaps it would be as well if he were to consult the Authors themselves, who could have best informed him of them. However, as I have no doubt that you have fully considered this testimony, I can only suppose, that, like the Antwerp Reformer, you are of opinion, “that all the phrases and ways of speaking, invented by the Fathers, being infected with anti-
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"christian errors, should be wholly laid
 "aside and suppressed." Mr. Lindsey
 seems to have thought their depositions
 of some consequence; and yet I remember
 but one Argument that he seems to lay
 any stress on, in order to invalidate their
 testimony. This therefore, should be an
 Argument of weight; let us see what it
 amounts to: He says, "that the word
 "Trinity never once occurs in their
 "writings." But if, from the times of
 Ignatius to Lactantius, the judgment of
 the Church on this article was constant
 and uniform, if the *substance* of the
 doctrine was expressly delivered, if the
 same ideas were conveyed, it matters not
 when the word was first formed; it was
 as applicable then as it is now, and it is
 the *doctrine* we contend for, not the *word*.
 Nor yet can I think you better justified
 in maintaining, that our present adhe-
 rence to this doctrine may be considered
 "as one of the most powerful obstructions
 "to the conversion of the Mahometans
 "and the Jews." From the present ap-
 pearance

appearance of things, I should be induced to assign this delay to very different causes: to the endless and uncharitable disputations of the Christian Church on its most fundamental doctrines; and to the little influence the precepts of our Religion seem to have on the Members of it. For little probability is there of gaining Profelytes to a Religion, which its avowed Professors dare to treat in their writings with contempt, and in their practice with reproach.

But a still better reason may be assigned from considering the nature of the Christian dispensation: which was to operate on the minds of men, not by force, but by conviction; by prudently using the opportunity, rather than by effecting it. Its progress, therefore, has been such as might be expected: gentle, yet persevering; slow, yet still increasfing. From the Scriptures we justly infer, that the religion of Christ will be UNIVERSAL; and that the gracious purpose of the Son of God, of bringing all men to the knowledge of the

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Truth,

Truth, though now carried on by gradual and almost imperceptible means, will, in its due season, be accomplished. That time is not yet come. But whenever it shall arrive, I trust that great Event will be marked with such signal evidences of divine power, such irresistible authority and strength; that neither the avowed opposition or secret artifice of any power on Earth shall be able to gain say or resist it.

The Divinity of the Holy Ghost, whose personal existence you call in question, rests on the same indubitable authority, the testimony of the Scriptures. For if the name, the attributes, the acts of God, be there ascribed to the Holy Spirit, we must conclude, that he is truly and properly God. I forbear mentioning that most remarkable passage, 1 Cor. xii. 4. &c. where there is a regular gradation through the three persons in the Godhead; each having his particular office assigned, and all uniting in the effect produced. But there is less reason to enter into a particular discussion

discussion of this Article; if the former is granted, most of the material Arguments would concur in support of this also; if that is denied, the attempt to prove the latter would be as unnecessary as ineffectual.

If, then, the doctrine of the Trinity is not contrary to the Scriptures, we are fully justified with respect to the object of our adoration. For worship is certainly due to him whom the Scriptures declare to be God. From the earliest ages of the Church, the greatest care was taken to prevent any improper worship from obtaining in it. No sooner had the worship of Angels, by a mistaken humility, taken place, than it became the immediate object of St. Paul's attention: he remarked the growing heresy with concern, and, by his authority, instantly suppressed it. The worship of Christ must have commenced with Christianity itself: But where do we find this Apostle, ever anxious for the purity of the Faith, endeavouring to check or even discour-

tenance this practice: On the contrary, by declaring, that in Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, he manifestly directs us to honour the Son, even as we honour the Father.

We find, indeed, many places in Scripture, asserting the *superiority* of the Father. But we are apt not to remember, that the Son stands in a two-fold relation to us: as the Second person in the Godhead and our Creator, and as our Redeemer, Intercessor and Advocate.

It is necessary, therefore, for the rightly understanding any passage descriptive of him, to consider in which of these relations he is at that time to be acknowledged. In the latter, he is undoubtedly inferior as concerning his human nature; in the former, he is, equally with the Father, God blessed for ever.

Hitherto I have only considered the doctrine of the Trinity, as it may be collected from Scripture; but perhaps you more particularly object to it as propounded in the Articles of the Church of England.

England. Had you gone no farther, I should have been glad to have considered you in the same light with that respectable Association of Dissidents, whose generous Zeal for Truth must be allowed to have been most eminently displayed: however, by their not distinguishing what is speculatively right from what is practicable, they have counteracted the very end they intended to promote; and whose honest and pious endeavours have been in vain exerted in this undiscerning Age, which distinguished not the advantages of a Reformation, on a Plan so friendly to Christian liberty, and at the same time so well calculated to promote Christian Unity and Christian Peace.

I am not, however, quite certain, that the Petitioning Clergy will be overjoyed at your declaring yourself their Zealous Friend and Associate. Some there may be of the same persuasion with yourself: But this I know, that there are among them, men of true Christian principles, of becoming candor and moderation, who

with rather to reform than subvert the present constitution of our Church; and, by a temperate and judicious revival of our Articles, to mitigate any seeming asperities in such as, from the different complexion of the times, it may be now less necessary to insist on. But I am mistaken if your name will be thought of any service to their cause; for, however they may value themselves on taking the lead in a reformation of the Christian Church, they will not be proud of enlisting under the banners of one who openly denies the Divinity of Christ.

Most sincerely do I lament with you the present imperfect state of Scriptural knowledge, and the unhappy occasions of it. But how then is this to be improved? by what means more effectually promoted? Learn Wisdom, say you, from the *material* World. Let but the sources of religious Truth be explored in the same manner with the laws of Nature; and the same success, the same just and easy explication, will follow. But would you
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recommend a similar process in cases widely different? In the one, indeed, the vanity of System will certainly mislead us, and the slow but regular process of Experiment alone can clearly lead us to sound Philosophy. With Revelation it is otherwise. There we find doctrines proposed to our belief, which must rest solely on the credit of that Revelation: for no train of experiments whatever, no critical patience or attention, could ever have suggested to our minds those sublimer doctrines of our Religion, which nevertheless we are bound most implicitly to believe. If no Revelation had been made, the other had been the most natural method, and the only one suited to our finite capacities: but we have now ground given us whereon to stand; an eminence, from whence the most amazing prospects open to our view; and to the discovery of which we could not possibly have been led, but from this advantageous situation.

Yet is our case very unfairly stated, when you say, that we *assume* a set of reli-

religious Tenets, which we undertake to *prove*. The truth is, that we find them delivered in the Scriptures, and, being required to give an account of our belief, we produce from thence our evidence; but not so much with a view of explaining these doctrines, as of convincing our Adversaries that thus it is written, and consequently thus we believe.

In the investigation of Scriptural Truth it is to be feared, that the true sense of the Text is often perverted both by ignorant and designing Men. But surely it is most probable, that they who controvert generally-received opinions, are most likely to be guilty of this charge. And may it not more justly be presumed that Socinus wrested the Scriptures to accommodate them to his particular Tenets, than that his Adversaries perverted their literal and obvious meaning, in order to overthrow his System?

But, be the blame where it may, it were to be wished that, if Men must err, they would err to themselves. There
must

must certainly be an aggravation of guilt, in spreading the evil, and communicating the infection to others. But surely it might humble the pride of those who value themselves on directing the Opinions of others, to observe with what force the most foolish Heresies have been able to perplex and confound the most essential Truths; the trouble of correcting Error being ever in proportion to the degree of Folly that attends it. Where then is the merit in imposing opinions, when even Folly itself is no bar to their reception? When the impression made is owing not so much to the importance or credibility of the Doctrine, as to the disposition of the person who receives it; and who, as the different temperament prevails, will be a Manichee or Unitarian, a Taborite or Moravian? Hence it is, that particular Heresies have been artfully adapted to particular times and circumstances. At one period, it is more judicious to appeal to the passions; at another, to the reason of Mankind. In short, whoever

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has sufficient art and knowledge of the world, and at the same time cruelty enough to be regardless of the consequences, need never doubt of being able to enslave the understandings of Mankind, and to lead them captive at his will.

Your situation has been too particular to be passed over in silence on this occasion. For some time past you have taken on you the direction of Theological Studies in a Place professedly set apart for the promotion of true Religion and Learning.

Here therefore at least it might be expected, that the genuine doctrines of Christianity would be taught in their original purity and truth. Are we then to believe that you have explained the Scriptures in a sense different from that which is the result of your own conviction? or that, not dissembling your private Opinions, you have expounded them agreeably thereto? The alternative is disagreeable; but since, as an honest Man, you could not

not submit to the former, it only remains, that for many years you have been employed in instilling Principles into the minds of Youth, wholly repugnant to the divine authority of the Gospel. First impressions are always thought of the utmost consequence. Is it a light thing, therefore, to begin with inculcating doubtful, or at best only probable, Opinions? is it nothing to take the advantage of young and pliant minds, and to instil such early Prejudices as may hereafter with difficulty be removed; Prejudices the more dangerous, as having a tendency, by flattering their reason, more effectually to mislead their judgement? Serenity of mind is at all events, if possible, to be preserved. You profess to know the value from the loss of it. You know likewise, that it is never so dangerously and severely shaken as by Religious doubts. How carefully, therefore, should we avoid even suggesting those difficulties which may in any wise endanger it! and how can we answer it to our Reason, our Conscience,

science, and even Humanity itself, to be in any degree instrumental in destroying that tranquillity of Mind, which may not, like your own, be so easily recovered, but may be lost for ever!

Before I conclude these remarks, I must once more return to that particular Measure which gave occasion to them. Every one will doubtless form their own judgement on the circumstance of your late Resignation; and if the conclusions are justly drawn, I care not how much they are in your favour. I mean not hereby to influence others, much less to call in question your Sincerity: on the contrary, I am willing to believe, that you have acted on the fullest conviction. But on this, as on all other occasions, let every circumstance go for its full worth; but for no more. In cases of this nature, Vanity we know will do much, Enthusiasm more. A Man must be little conversant in the history of the Passions and prejudices of Mankind, not to know to what lengths they are capable of leading them.

them. The actions of a man labouring under any gross Delusion are not to be estimated in the common way; be his Intentions ever so upright, he may, nevertheless, be most miserably deceived. So far am I therefore from laying any stress on the resignation of Worldly possessions, that I should be unmoved by acts of much greater mortification: for if, *sufferings* were of any value in evidence, to what a cloud of Witnesses might we appeal! They may indeed prove the sincerity of the sufferer, but by no means his doctrine; his own conviction, but not the strength of his cause. Does not the miserably distorted Bramin believe that he is doing service to his God? will not the Jew submit to the tortures of the Inquisition rather than confess the Divinity of Christ? and what delusion is there too gross for our belief; what Tenets too impious and heretical, when we reflect, that the Anabaptists, rather than recede from their senseless and extravagant Opinions, courted,

courted, with more than common Enthusiasm, misery, tortures, and death?

Let others, therefore, inconsiderately form their judgement on your *present* conduct. By your *future* proceedings only can you be fully justified, or by ~~that~~ alone condemned. You have indeed thought proper to divest yourself of the character of a Minister of the Church of Christ: a most sacred and important trust; and which should not be laid down rashly and unadvisedly, but with the same mature deliberation with which it ought to be accepted. However, since you are by this means become still more the object of public observation, may your subsequent behaviour merit their applause! For my own part, I take no Man's character on trust; nor shall any single or even repeated acts of his life, however specious or splendid, prevail on me to give a final and decisive opinion. It is the whole tenor only of a thoroughly consistent Character which ought finally to determine our approbation. And in weighing the

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actions

actions of men, it is the perfection of human sagacity, not only to find out Truth, but also what is *not* Truth, however it may carry the appearance of it.

If, therefore, after having disburthened your Conscience, and, in this public manner, born witness to the sincerity of your Opinions, you shall *not* rest satisfied with the testimony of your own heart, and the consciousness of having faithfully discharged your duty; if, after having disdained, for the sake of filthy lucre, to abide in the Faith you disapproved, you shall yet scruple not to make a gain of your Heretical doctrines, and delude others thereby; if, with a furious and unbecoming zeal, you compass sea and land to make Profelytes, and, from the vanity of drawing away Disciples after you, become a *public* Teacher of Error, to the Destruction of social Order and Christian Peace: it will then appear how much you are entitled to that Character you wish to maintain. And, judging of your Principles by these effects which they produce, I shall

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think it no breach of Charity hereafter to consider you as the most dangerous Enemy of our most Holy Faith: “ inasmuch as
 “ no professed Infidel is so much a foe to
 “ Christianity as he who perverts their
 “ purity and truth into falsehood and cor-
 “ ruption.”

But if, on the contrary, with all Christian meekness and humility, and with no regard to any Worldly consideration whatever, you seek only the truth in righteousness; if you are contented with the liberty of freely worshiping God in the sanctuary of your own conscience, forbearing to controvert the opinions of others, or impose your own; if you still continue to regard with candor and charity the members of that Community with which you cannot associate, and the established doctrines of that Church which you cannot approve,—great and glorious will be your present as well as future reward. I shall then think with infinite regret on that fatal Delusion, which, in times so unfavourable to Religion,

ligion, has unhappily deprived us of one, so well qualified to have appeared in its support: and while I truly respect your confessed abilities and exemplary manners, shall, at the same time, most sincerely lament, that to the VIRTUES of the MAN, you have not been happy enough to add the FAITH of a CHRISTIAN.

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